

**APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
February 16, 2022**

**TESTIMONY OF
THE BUSHNELL
&
CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
CAPA - SHUBERT THEATRE
&
PALACE THEATER
&
STAMFORD CENTER FOR THE ARTS**

H.B. No. 5037 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

As always, we extend our gratitude and appreciation to the Committee, to the General Assembly, and to the Governor for the financial support that we have received in past years. Our four (4) organizations represent the designated funding identified as the "Performing Arts Centers" which includes The Bushnell – Hartford, Palace Theater - Waterbury, Shubert – New Haven, and Palace Theatre - Stamford. As the largest non-profit cultural venues in the State, over the years, we have all received significant State investment to maximize our capacity and regional impact, to which we are again eternally grateful.

As you are aware due to COVID-19, on March 13, 2020, our venues were the first to close. As of this testimony, we all have recalled 100% of our staff in order to fully reopen our venues and welcome patrons back safely. As we prepared for reopening after 18 months of closure, we also worked to create the CT Performing Arts Coalition with our colleagues at The Garde Arts Center in New London and The Warner Theatre in Torrington and launched a marketing campaign in the fall of 2021, letting Connecticut residents know that, once again, "It's Showtime." This collaborative effort was intended to educate residents about the depth, breadth and diversity of Connecticut performing arts community and help drive economic activity at each of our venues. This collaboration and resulting campaign are important steps towards reminding residents about the pre-COVID arts and entertainment landscape in Connecticut when the norm was for our four venues to collectively host 750,000 patrons each year, 88% of whom were from Connecticut. We also employed more than 1,100 individuals across full-time, part-time and seasonal positions, as well as engaged more than 1,900 volunteers, facilities and services for about 426 regional organizations such as schools and smaller arts nonprofits, as well as businesses and civic organizations

While we were optimistic when reopening our theaters this past Fall, a return to pre-COVID/normal business activity has yet to be realized. In reality, we have experienced significant patron hesitancy to return to "live" performances based on issues of consumer confidence, and health and safety concerns. This patron hesitancy has resulted in an estimated 55- 60% loss in attendance compared to the years prior to COVID. While we remain focused on our mission driven programs to provide quality entertainment, arts and educational opportunities, community engagement and improved quality of life to our urban centers, this devastating loss of attendance further impacts our ability to regain financial stability during these unprecedented times.

Additionally, since our collective reopening, and in accordance with industry standards, we have all made a significant investment in health and safety measures such as improved HVAC filtration equipment and increased security necessary to enforce masking requirements and to verify proof of vaccination and/or negative test result. We are also being buffeted with inflationary expenses associated with higher utilities, insurance costs and related facility overhead.

Through these challenging times, we were hopeful that federal relief programs being offered to help alleviate this long-term financial strain would provide long-term stability. While some programs were helpful such as PPP, and SVOG, other assistance programs were less so. Given significant health and safety ramp up costs to ready our facilities and staff, the protracted nature of the closure and our consistent overhead expenses, and concerns of consumer confidence and vaccine efficacy, , the question remains when and will our operations and revenues return to pre-COVID levels? And although we have been able to reopen our venues in the Fall 2021). This remains the great unknown, only exacerbating the negative financial impact to our organizations.

At the State level, we are grateful that Governor Lamont has again included our designated line item of funding in the biennial budget. Although these dollars are welcomed and will, as always, be wisely used, the reality is that the current identified level of funding is just not enough.

Due to the COVID crisis, the financial and operational stability of our organizations is uncertain. The Governor and State legislature can help to ensure our regional performing arts centers are ready to operate when they will be most needed by the State, we ask that you consider additional ARPA funding for the fiscal year of 2023-2024, in hopes that by then we will benefit from a more stable and healthier environment.



David Fay
President & CEO



Michael E Moran, Jr.
President & CEO



Frank Tavera
CEO



Anthony McDonald
Executive Director